
Barrow Part of Successful Bipartisan Effort to Protect Veterans' Health Care

Washington, DC - Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) was part of a successful bipartisan effort this week to fight a new proposal that could force veterans to use their private insurance to pay for the treatment of combat-related injuries. On Wednesday, a letter signed by Barrow and over sixty members of Congress from both parties was sent to President Obama strongly opposing a new proposal under consideration by the Obama administration to allow the VA to bill veterans' private insurance companies for the treatment of service-connected injuries or disabilities. This could lead to an increase in health care premiums for veterans, and may also discourage employers from hiring veterans who have been injured in combat. The administration announced yesterday that it would not move forward with the proposal.

"President Obama was right to take back this suggestion, and I'm glad he did," said Barrow. "His record of support for our veterans and military families is strong, and this proposal just didn't reflect that. I support the President, but I'll never shy away from speaking up whenever I think he's on the wrong track - especially when it comes to the men and women who serve our nation in the armed services."

Under current policy, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is responsible for paying for the treatment of any injuries or disabilities resulting from a veterans' service to their country. Veterans, or their private insurers, are currently responsible for paying for health care costs that are unrelated to their military service.

The letter applauds the Obama Administration's efforts to increase funding for the VA and its plans to expand employment opportunities for veterans:

"We know you are committed to expanding employment opportunities for veterans. Already this year, your administration and Congress

have worked to create countless jobs for veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this proposal would undermine our efforts."

The full text of the
letter to President Obama:

March 17, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We first want to take this opportunity to thank you for the clear commitment your administration's budget outline makes to our nation's veterans. The proposed 10 percent increase in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for next fiscal year is truly historic. We believe the 2010 budget will ensure the VA never again faces the chronic under-funding that prevented countless veterans from receiving the health benefits they have earned.

While we strongly support your plans to increase funding for the VA by \$25 billion over the next five years, it is with equal conviction that we oppose the proposal to bill veterans' private health insurance plans for care and treatment of service-connected injuries or disabilities.

We do not give our veterans health care - they earn it - and it would be

unacceptable for the VA to ask our veterans to pay for the treatment of injuries received while serving our nation in uniform. That responsibility belongs to the VA, and it would be wrong to outsource the responsibility of covering the care of those veterans to private insurance companies.

Additionally, this proposal could harm our veterans and their families in unintended, yet very serious ways, jeopardizing their families' health care and even negatively affecting veterans' employment opportunities. Billing a veteran's private health insurance for the treatment of service-connected injuries could lead to increased health care premiums, and could potentially discourage employers from hiring veterans.

We know you are committed to expanding employment opportunities for veterans. Already this year, your administration and Congress have worked to create countless jobs for veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this proposal would undermine our efforts.

We urge you to take this proposal off the table, and let us instead focus on ensuring that our veterans receive the full care and benefits they have earned. The moral obligation our nation has to our veterans demands nothing less. We are happy to discuss these issues with you further as we move toward a final budget for the VA.

We would like to thank you again for your commitment to improving care for the men and women who have borne the battle, and who have sacrificed their health and well-being in serving their country. Thank you for your service to our nation.

Sincerely,

Glenn Nye

Anne Kirkpatrick

John Hall

Gabrielle Giffords

Diane Watson

Larry Kissel

Steve Kagen

Eric Massa

Bill Foster

Bart Stupak

Harry Teague

Dan Boren

Michael Arcuri

John Barrow

Jerry McNerney

Tom Perriello

Carol Shea-Porter

Travis Childers

Rob Wittman

Ben Lujan

Tom Rooney

Sanford Bishop

Dina Titus

Ciro Rodriguez

Joe Sestak

Betsey Markey

Madeleine Bordallo

Suzanne Kosmas

Marion Barry

Alan Grayson

Harry Mitchell

Dennis Kucinich

Michael Michaud

John Dingell

William Delahunt

Ron Klein

Ben Chandler

Mazie Hirono

Betty Sutton

Robert Wexler

Rick Larson

Tim Bishop

John Boccieri

James Oberstar

Mary Jo Kilroy

Collin Peterson

Leonard Boswell

Lois Capps

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

Daniel B. Maffei

Mike Honda

Debbie Halvorson

Michael McMahon

Mike McIntyre

Phil Hare

Charles Rangel

Lincoln Davis

Dennis Cardoza

Charlie Wilson

Bobby Bright

Gary Peters

Joe Courtney

Jim Himes

Jason Altmire

Peter Welch

Martin Heinrich

Parker Griffith

Mike Ross

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Contact: Jane Brodsky, (202)
225-2823

